

Fairbury Photographer Dudley Fultz Had Interesting Life

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John Henry Fultz was born in 1842 in Hagerstown, Maryland. Harriett Natholia Swisher was born in 1846 in West Virginia. In 1868, John and Harriett got married in Livingston County, Illinois. They settled on a farm near Weston, Illinois.

Sadly, the first two children of John and Harriett Fultz, Hattie and Charles, both died before they were three years old. By 1885, John and Harriett had five more children between the ages of one and eleven. In March of 1885, Harriett Fultz became very ill. She told her oldest child, Dudley Dayton Fultz, that if something happened to her, she had arranged for a neighboring farmer to raise him.

Mrs. John Fultz died in 1885 at the age of 39. Within one year, John Fultz married Margaret A. Brown. They left 11-year-old Dudley with a neighbor family and took the other four children with them to Colorado. Ten years after arriving in Colorado, John Fultz died in 1895 at the age of 53.

Dudley Fultz went to live with the Hester family along Route 24 just east of Chenoa. His food often consisted of rice and a glass of milk every day. Dudley later recounted that back in those days, there was no emphasis on personal hygiene like today. Dudley recounted that he had a bath every spring and fall, whether he needed it or not.

His foster father had a plant nursery on his farm. Dudley spent long hours working with the seedlings. He learned that he did not want to grow up to be a nurseryman. Dudley next went to live at the Robert Stewart home. He was expected to work to earn his keep. Stewart was a staunch Scotch Presbyterian and forbade the youth to whistle on Sundays.

Dudley liked to learn, so he attended country school and worked in the fields after school was out. One night, he worked so late in the field that he fell asleep doing his homework that night. The next morning at school, when he did not have all his homework done, his teacher made him write, "Procrastination is the thief of time" 50 times on the blackboard.

One of his country school teachers told him about a "teacher's school" at Normal, and encouraged him to work toward being a teacher. Three months before his 16th birthday, he walked to Chenoa and took the train to Normal. At that time, each prospect for college admittance was interviewed by the president. During this interview, it was discovered Dudley was a few months short of the minimum admittance age of 16. Dudley was sent to a prep school in Bloomington while he lived with an aunt. He got such good grades at the prep school that the university admitted him. He was also given a job as a janitor's helper.

Dudley received his teaching diploma a few months before he turned 18 years of age. Desperate to support himself, he interviewed for a Towanda teaching job. When he admitted to the school board president that he was not quite 18 years old, the president said he would tell no one if Dudley did not tell anyone.

Some of the new ideas that Dudley had just learned at ISNU were not popular with small-town school boards. Because of this, Dudley moved around and taught at several different Central Illinois schools. He also grew very interested in the relatively new field of photography. It became his primary hobby.

Dudley Dayton Fultz married Iva Beatrice Mapel in 1899. They had three daughters named Ivis Beth, Lileth, and Arla Zenith. Dudley and Iva divorced, and he married Stella Lamp in 1920. Dudley and Stella had two daughters named Valerie Mae and Gloria.

In 1907, Dudley gave up his teaching career and moved to Fairbury. He started out selling business forms to local companies. He also fixed up a darkroom and was soon making pictures for profit. Being a photographer became an almost six-decade-long profession. He also sold Zenith radios in his photography shop.

In that era, Bloomington was known as the circus capital of the United States. Some of the world's great aerial acts headquartered there. These aerial acts included the Wards, the Costello's, and Valentina. When Jennie and Bessie Ward were killed in the Hagenbeck-Wallace wreck at Sheldon, Dudley made the much-in-demand photos of the graveside rites in Bloomington. Another photograph he took was of the famed aerialist, Miss Leitzel, sitting on his camera box on the show grounds in Bloomington. Dudley often traveled as far away as 150 miles to performances of the major circuses.

In addition to the circus performers, Dudley took photos of Frank Gotch, the world's champion wrestler. He also took pictures of boxing greats Jess Willard and Bob Fitzsimmons. Dudley's camera also captured cowboy Tom Mix.

In the 1910s, Fairbury was known as the motorcycle capital of the world. Dudley Fultz owned the first Indian motorcycle in Fairbury. Frank and William Goudy were world-class Excelsior motorcycle racers and were inducted into the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998. Dudley Fultz took various photographs of these early Fairbury motorcycle owners.

Dudley photographed thousands of weddings, anniversaries, reunions, and wrecks. For more than 25 years, he was the official photographer for the TP&W Railroad. Back in that era, the railroad had a lot of wrecks that required photographs to document the accidents.

First-grade photographs by Fultz became a ritual for more than a generation of Fairbury students. Many of these children later had their wedding photos taken by Dudley. In some cases, Dudley took wedding anniversary photos of these same children. He was

remembered as a tall, lean man with the memory of an elephant. Dudley Fultz lived to be 101 years old and died in 1975.

Dudley Fultz was a Fairbury photographer from 1907 until 1962. He retired at age 92 in 1962 and sold his business to Bill Morse of Pontiac. Although some of his photographs are over 100 years old, they are still in excellent condition. Many of his First Grade class photos and Fairbury motorcycling images still survive and are valued treasures to their owners.

The Fairbury Echoes Museum has a new display with information about many early photographers, including Dudley Fultz. Admission to the museum is free, and the new collection is a fascinating review of Fairbury's photographic history.



Dudley Fultz – Fairbury Photographer